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END and DESIGN
OF
PRAYER,
OR,

The Reasonableness of Praying to an Un-
changeably Wise, Powerful, and Good GOD.

In Answer to the Objections of the late EARL of
ROCHESTER, Mr. BLOUNT, My LORD
SHAFTSBURY, and other Modern *Deists*.

In a LETTER to a Friend.

By G. BENSON.

Job xxi. 14, 15. — *They say unto God, depart from us, for we
desire not the Knowledge of thy ways.*

*What is the Almighty that we shou'd serve him? And what pro-
fit shou'd we have if we pray unto him?*

L O N D O N:

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THE
END and DESIGN
OF
PRAYER, &c.

Dear Sir,



S Religion is now under the severest Examination both among Friends and Enemies, it was (you may remember) the Subject of our last Conversation; and after I had told you that I cou'd see nothing unreasonable in praying to an infinitely wise, powerful, good and unchangeable Being; you

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made me promise to write down * my Sentiments, that you might peruse them at your leisure, which I now do with all imaginable readiness.

You and I have long agreed in this, that there can't be a more severe Reflection cast upon any thing that goes under the name of *Religion* than the representing it, as something not fit to be inquired into, and examin'd: The *Libertines* are thereupon ready to insult, and the *inquisitive* can't forbear suspecting that what is kept in the dark, is unreasonable, and can't stand the Trial; for *Truth* fears not the Light, but then appears in its native Beauty and Lustre, when most curiously pry'd into, and most publickly laid open.

The Objections of the *Licentious*, and the Queries of *studious* and *inquisitive* Men have generally issued in the Service of *true Religion*, by giving occasion to the Pious and Learned to ingage in the Cause, to clear up the Truth, to separate it from Error and

* This Letter was wrote long before Mr. *Archer's Essay*, but my learned Friends persuaded me not to suppress this upon the publishing of that, as looking upon them not to interfere, but rather mutually to confirm one another.

Falshood,

Falshood, and to set it in the strongest point of Light.

Nor shou'd we at this Day have had so many Difficulties solved, had it not been for the Attempts of *Libertines* to overthrow all that is Sacred, or for the Queries of the *Virtuous* and *Inquisitive*, who are always the best Friends to *true Religion*. The number of *rational Believers* is thus increased; and that confirm'd by Conviction and Evidence, which was perhaps at first receiv'd only from a Reverence to our Teachers, or upon some other as weak Foundation.

Among the many Difficulties which *Libertines* have started, this concerning *Prayer* is none of the least, *viz.* “ To what end shou'd
 “ a *God* of infinite Wisdom, Goodness and
 “ Power, be petition'd to do what he sees
 “ and knows to be good and proper for any
 “ of his Creatures? And how absurd must
 “ it be to imagine that such imperfect Be-
 “ ings, as we are, can by our *Prayers* (or
 “ any thing that we can possibly alledge)
 “ move or persuade an all-wise and un-
 “ changeable Being?

But in order to do them Justice, I will give you their Objections in their own Words, Mr. *Blount* in his Notes upon *Apollonius T.*
 his

his Life, *p.* 38. has these Words, “ Some
 “ few of the *Heathens* used no Prayers at all,
 “ as thinking that the *Deity* was not to be
 “ moved by Intreaty, or bribed by Sacrifice;
 “ and partly because they held it a Presump-
 “ tion in Man to direct *God* what to do, and
 “ what to forbear.

The Earl of *Rochester* seems to have been much of the same Opinion; See Bishop *Burnet's* Life of the Earl of *Rochester*, *p.* 53. My Lord *Shaftsbury* (whose admirable Writings can never be sufficiently admired upon many Accounts, I wou'd have said upon every Account, if his *Lordship* had not unhappily imbib'd some Prejudices against Christianity, and intermix'd them with his most elegant and noble Performances, even tho' the *Christian Religion* gives the justest and most sublime Ideas of that *Virtue*, after which he made so curious an *Inquiry*, and recommends the Imitation of *God's* moral Perfections, Obedience to his Commands, and universal Benevolence to Mankind, as the sum and substance of all *true Religion*) that noble and polite Author in his *Characteristicks*, *Vol.* I. *p.* 170. says, “ That the Antients
 “ esteem'd *Soliloquy*, or Self-Examination, a
 “ more

“ more religious Work than any *Prayers*, or
 “ other Duty in the Temple.

In order to answer them fairly and fully
 I will make them all due Concessions, and
 do grant freely,

I. That *Prayer* was not instituted to inform
God of any thing, as if he did not know it
 of himself.

The best Foundation in Divinity is to form
 just and worthy Notions of the Attributes of
God: Only allow him to be Omniscient, and
 this Observation is confirm'd beyond Dispute;
 for 'tis impossible to inform him that knows
 all things, inasmuch as what is infinite ad-
 mits of no Addition: He that made us,
 knows our Frame, and all our Circumstances,
 what we are, and what we do; nay, what
 we can be or do, in all possible Cases and
 upon all Suppositions.

Upon this Account there's no Occasion for
 our much speaking; *For our heavenly Father* Matt. vi.
knoweth what things we have need of, before ^{7, 8.}
we ask him. The *Heathens* might fancy that
 their Gods wanted to be informed, but this is
 unworthy of him whose Understanding is in-
 finite.

II. Nor was *Prayer* instituted, in order to
 importune infinite Goodness, as if it were
 slow

flow and backward to exert itself; or as if we cou'd move *God* by our Importunity to depart from his steady unchangeable Measures of Counsel and Action.

No, *God* is wise, and good and unchangeable, and therefore neither needs to be urged to do good when and where 'tis proper; nor can he (upon any Account) be induced to vary from the Scheme, which infinite Wisdom dictated.

Indeed all Comparisons fall short, and rather lessen than aggrandize the thing; but (*if I may be allowed to compare small things to great*) you may as well go to persuade a Rock to melt, or a Mountain to remove out of its place, as use Words to persuade *God* to do an unwise, unholy, or unjust Thing.

That *Pathos* of Eloquence which wou'd move the most resolved and dispassionate among Men, cou'd not affect *God*. Your Favourites, *Tully* and *Demosthenes*, cou'd have prevail'd nothing in such a Case; neither up-lifted Hands, nor distilling Eyes, nor the most moving *Rhetoric* of Looks, Words, or Action, wou'd make any Impression. I acknowledge (with *Mr. Blount's Heathens*) *that God is not to be moved* (in such Cases)
by

by Intreaties, nor bribed by Sacrifice ; and that it wou'd be Presumption in Man to direct him (in such Instances) what to do, or what to forbear. And with my Lord Rochester, that the Deity is not so weak a Being as to be overcome by Importunities. There's no bribing, flattering, melting or overawing him ; he's of one Mind, and who can turn him ? The Generality of the Heathens might hope perhaps to prevail with their Gods by a clamorous Importunity, and much Speaking ; but Christians are forbid such vain Repetitions.

For our Requests can no more alter the divine Purposes, than our Praises can add any thing to God's Perfection or Happiness.

By this Time I suppose you may fear that I have given up the cause ; and inquire,
 “ To what end then shou'd we pray at all,
 “ if we can neither inform, nor persuade
 “ God ? In other Cases we argue for the Reasonableness of a thing from common Consent ; and if this will hold (you may allow that) it seems to be the voice of Reason, and the prevailing sense of Mankind, that Men shou'd call upon God by Prayer, and Praise, for a supply of their Wants, a redress of their Grievances, and
 “ as a grateful Acknowledgment of all their

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“ Mercies ;

“ Mercies; and thus *holy Scripture* also re-
 “ presents the matter, when it advises *Chri-*
 “ *stians, to be careful for nothing but in every*
 “ *thing by Prayer and Supplication with Thankf-*
 “ *giving to make their Requests known unto*
 “ God; and sets it forth as a possible thing
 “ for Man to move God, by intimating that
 “ *Jacob wrestled, had Power with God and*
 “ *prevail'd.* That *Elias* was but a Man, and
 “ yet by his Prayer he prevail'd with God to
 “ with-hold Rain from the Land of Israel
 “ three Years and a half; and again he prayed,
 “ and the Heavens gave Rain, and the Earth
 “ brought forth her Fruit. And has not our
 “ Lord also bid his Disciples, ask and ye shall
 “ receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it
 “ shall be opened unto you? confirming it thus,
 “ for commonly such as ask (*importunately of*
 “ *Men*) receive, and he that earnestly seeketh,
 “ at the Hands of his Fellow-Creature, find-
 “ eth, and unto him that knocketh it shall be
 “ opened; and how much more might success
 “ be hoped for, from the infinitely wise and
 “ affectionate Father of the Universe, the
 “ common Friend and Parent of all? And a-
 “ gain he declared, That *whatsoever they*
 “ *shou'd ask in his Name, they shou'd receive.*

“ To

“ To this end spoke he the *Parable of the*
 “ *Woman's troubling the unjust Judge, 'till she*
 “ *obtained her Request; and the Parable of*
 “ *the Man that went to borrow Loaves of his*
 “ *Friend at Midnight, who also prevail'd by*
 “ his Importunity; and 'tis usual in *Scripture*
 “ to represent *God* as an affectionate Parent,
 “ listening to the Cries of his Children, and
 “ mov'd by them.

As to the common and prevailing Sentiments of Mankind, they are of no Moment, unless they be founded upon Truth and Reason. And as to your Queries from *holy Scripture*, I answer, that *God* has not a Body, tho' several Parts and Members of the humane Body be in *holy Writ* ascrib'd to him. In like manner all humane Passions, Defects, and Imperfections are to be far remov'd from *God*, and such Representations to be look'd upon, only as Accommodations to our Capacities, as humane ways of Speaking, or familiar Comparisons by way of Condescension to us, and to our manner of thinking and expressing ourselves.

For whoever wou'd understand the *holy Scriptures*, must remember that they are calculated to plant and promote *Religion*, even among the lowest of Mankind, and as such,

their Language is popular and speaks according to common Appearances. They meekly condescend (as our *Blessed Lord* did) to *instruct the Poor*, and that after a most easy and familiar way, speaking of things spiritual and Divine, in the Language, and after the manner of Men.

Thus, in the Case before us, inasmuch as Men want to be informed of the Circumstances of the distressed, and to be importun'd to do Good ; the *Sacred Writers*, by way of *Analogy*, apply this to *God*. Not that he really Events to be inform'd or importun'd to help, where 'tis proper ; but only that the Events are, in some measure, alike ; *viz.* *God*, in all proper Cases, grants Mercies in Consequence of Mens praying for them, as Parents regard the Requests of their obedient or penitent Children.

But though the Events be alike (and upon that Account they are spoken of in the same Phrase, and Manner) yet the Principles, from which such Events proceed, are by no means alike ; for, earthly Parents are commonly moved by Pity and Sympathy, which have a Mixture of Passion and Uneasiness in them. *God* acts only from pure Reason, and supreme Goodness: An earthly Parent may mistake

stake the Case, and grant Requests, or deny them improperly, through an Excess of Fondness, or for want of natural Affection; but unerring Wisdom and infinite Goodness can never do so. So far the *Analogy* holds, that our *Heavenly Father* (as well as an earthly Parent) bestows Favours upon the praying and well-disposed, which he with-holds from such as are of a different Temper and Practice.

Thus, I think, I have answer'd your *Queries* from *Holy Scripture*, and fully vindicated my own Concessions.

I therefore now return to the *Objections* which the *Sceptics* pretend to draw from *Reason*.

But before I proceed to what I reckon the chief End of *Prayer* and the *main Solution* of their *Difficulties*, I would propose this as one, and that no inconsiderable Advantage of *Prayer*, viz. that *God* does hereby most graciously condescend to our Infirmities, in allowing, nay, inviting us this way to relieve our Hearts, when most oppressed, by pouring out our Moans and Complaints into his Ear, as one that is most tenderly concern'd for us, and kindly and mercifully disposed to relieve us; for though he knows it as exactly
as

as we can lay it before him ; yet 'tis a great Relief under any pressing Calamity to unbo-
 som our selves, and give a Vent to the Ful-
 ness of our Hearts, in the Presence of a wise
 and compassionate Friend, even though he
 be perfectly acquainted with the Case, and
 all its attending Circumstances : To talk it
 over to our selves, and in *perfect Solitude* to
 give our distressed Thoughts *Breath and Ac-*
cent, can by no means afford that Relief,
 which the laying it before a kind, powerful,
 and wise Friend is capable of affording : And,
 finally, there are many Cases which it may
 be improper to spread before any one, ex-
 cept the infinitely wise and benevolent *Ruler*
 of all, who considers our Frame, who pities
 our Infirmities, and who will not expose us,
 nor take any Advantages against us from his
 Knowledge of our Distresses, no, nor of our
 many Crimes and Follies neither, if we do
 but sincerely repent of them, and carefully
 guard against them for the time to come.

But to return to the *main Solution*, I would
 ask (though *Omniscience* can't want to be in-
 formed, nor *infinite Wisdom and Goodness* to
 be importun'd to do what is proper, nor the
unchangeable Ruler of the Universe alter his
 Counsels or Measures of Action ; yet) where
 is

is the Absurdity if we should suppose that he (who has laid the *Plan* of the *natural World* in such magnificent Harmony, Order, and Proportion ; and that has adjusted things to things in such exact Number, Weight and Measure) may have laid the Plan of the *moral or rational World* in a signal and harmonious Correspondence to the *natural World*, as well as connected and proportioned the several Parts of the *moral Scheme* to one another ? And that thus there may be a Distinction frequently made, even in this World, between such as pray, and such as neglect it ?

Nay, does not *History*, *Reason*, and *Observation* evidently show that in several Instances 'tis actually so ? *i. e.* the Events in the *natural World* which bring *Judgment* or *Mercy* to *Mankind*, are, by the infinite Wisdom and Power of the *Creator* and *Governour* of all, so calculated, as only to be Consequences of his framing the *Heavens* and the *Earth*, and preserving their Being and Motions in that State and Order, to which (in pursuance of their first Disposition) they naturally tended ?

And yet how exactly do such Consequences happen at the appointed Seasons, so as
to

See Dr.
Burnet's
Theory,
&c.

to reward the Righteous, and punish the Guilty?

To this purpose it deserves to be inquired, whether God did not calculate the Structure of the *primæval Heavens and Earth*, so as greatly to conduce to the *Paradisaical Happiness*, to bless Man in his State of Innocence and Integrity? And afterwards as remarkably suit the Course of Nature to the State of things, to curse the Earth with Barrenness, as a just Judgment upon the Disobedient?

Did he not by the particular *Constitution* of the *Heavens* and the *Earth* before the Flood, occasion the *World, that then was*, to perish by an *universal Deluge*, when the *Earth* was degenerate, and *all Flesh had corrupted their Ways*?

* And did he not very wonderfully, by the like Appointment, cause a *Volcano* to

* If any of these Instances be found to be *miraculous*, and not the Consequences of the *original Plan of Creation* (as indeed I am not positive, and therefore have proposed them as *Queries*) 'tis only placing them under the Head of *Interposition*; and leaving every one to substitute what Instances he finds to be just and well grounded; for (tho' I may not have hit upon them) I'm persuaded there are numberless Instances of such an *Harmony*, which lay open clearly to superior Beings, tho' the Film upon our Eyes in this state of *Darkness and Imperfection* may intercept the glorious Prospect.

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break out in a dreadful Shower of Fire and Brimstone, in the very place where *Sodom* and *Gomorrha* stood, swallowing them up suddenly, together with two neighbouring Cities, just when their Sins were grown to an enormous height?

And who, without the strongest Prejudices, can observe, how by the same wise and over-ruling *Providence*, he made way for the spread of the *Christian Doctrine* (when the Time fixed in the *Scheme* of *divine Providence*, and pointed out by *antient Prophecies*, was fully come) by the great Increase of Knowledge, and the easy Inter-course thro' the *Roman Empire*?

And, may not the Fruitfulness of the *Land of Canaan* when it was proposed as a Reward to *Israel's* Obedience, and its present Barrenness, when no such End is to be answered thereby, be consider'd as another instance of the Harmony which is founded in the *Plan of Creation or Providence* between the *material* and *intelligent* World? And finally, are there not a great many Instances to persuade us, that *God* has made the present Earth of such a Frame and Structure, as that it tends towards a *Conflagration* (as naturally as the *Antedeluvian Earth* tended to-

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wards

wards an *universal Deluge*) and that it will actually blaze out, when the affairs of *Providence* are prepared for it, and the Inhabitants of this *earthly Globe* are ripe for *Judgment* or *Mercy*?

Thus has the vast, the incomprehensible Wisdom of *God* adapted the *natural* and *moral* World one to another, so as to run hand in hand, and correspond in their great *Crises*, and some more remarkable *Conjunctures*: And a close Observer will find it so in many Cases of a more particular Nature! Thus the vicious and loose (who are generally the Contemners of *Prayer* and Devotion) are punished with several Diseases and Disasters, to which the pious, and the temperate are not exposed; the rash, the passionate, and the proud are more obnoxious to Evils than the religious and meek, the humble and resign'd; and the same holds good in many other Cases. Well, and if *God* have thus laid the *Plan* of the *moral World*, then he may be *unchangeable*, and yet grant Favours in answer to *Prayers*, which Favours he wou'd have granted to none but the *Suppliant*. Nay, upon this Supposition, he wou'd be *changeable*, and vary from his *Scheme*, if he equally regarded the *praying* and the *prayerless*. Such

Such a notion of the *original Plan* of things advances the Glory of God, and magnifies his Knowledge and Wisdom, Goodness and Power to a stupendous Degree, inasmuch * it implies his foreseeing who wou'd pray and who wou'd not pray, and when and with what Propriety and Sincerity every *Prayer* wou'd be offered up, that ever shou'd be made upon Earth, from the *Creation* to the *Consummation of all Things*. And that he has calculated a *Scheme* that is large enough to take in an inconceivable variety of Cases, and in the common course of things very frequently to proportion Blessings to the Frequency, Propriety and Sincerity of every Man's Petitions.

This I call the *Plan of Creation*.

But 'tis altogether reasonable to think that God has also appointed his own Interposition (either mediately or immediately) in some particular Cases, as part of the *original Plan of his Providence over this Earth*; because no

* Note, But, suppose the *Prescience of contingent Events* should be looked upon as contradictory and absurd, 'twill be all one to the present Solution; for 'tis only considering the *great and wise Governour of the World*, as steadily resolved to deal with Men according to their Conduct, whenever or by what means soever he comes acquainted therewith. Though I must confess that for my own part I can see no Inconsistency between the *Divine Prescience* and *Human Liberty*.

Scheme (perhaps) can be so calculated as to reach the designed End, without the *divine Interposition* in some particular Cases and Conjunctions: Nor is this any more than what is unavoidable, where the temporal interests of Men are so frequently opposite and inconsistent. Not but that I reckon the *divine Interposition* * to be rare and unusual, and only where the Case does more eminently require it; and am thoroughly convinced, that neither the *natural course of things* in consequence of the *Plan of Creation*, nor that *divine Interposition* (which is only a part of the *Plan of Providence*) does always make a *Distinction* between the *Righteous* and the *Wicked* in this *present state* of things, which only argues that the *Scheme of Providence* reaches into another State; and in this enlarged View we may affirm that God will put a *thoro'* and *universal Distinction* between them that seek his Face, and them that seek it not.

To set this matter in a different Light, I wou'd further observe, that among *Ment* there is a certain *Temper* and *Disposition of Mind* which a *wise Giver* expects in such as he *favours*; and that without a regard thereto,

* *Nec Deus interfit, nisi dignus vindice nodus Inciderit.* Horat. Ep. ad Pison.

Bounty and Beneficence wou'd be Weakness and Imprudence: Will a Wiseman be as kind to the careless, the perverse and the ungrateful, as to the suppliant, the modest, the humble and the grateful? 'Till the *eternal, unalterable relations of things cease*, God can't be supposed to love the impious and disobedient, as well as the pious, the penitent, the virtuous, and the suppliant.

If therefore it can be made appear that *Prayer* tends to plant and cherish this Temper and Disposition in Man, which God loves, and for which in the *Scheme of Providence* he has provided Blessing and Mercy; and that the neglect of *Prayer* is usually attended with the contrary Disposition, of which God disapproves, and for which in the *Scheme of Providence* he has provided Punishments, Then the Difficulty vanishes at once; and there's no Contradiction in saying, that an *unchangeable God* may answer Prayers; nay, that 'tis reasonable for Men, and their plain Duty, to pray to a *wise and good God*, inas-much as they are thereby made more meet to partake of his Favours.

The *Rational and Apostolic* Distinction of our Duty is into that of *Godliness, Righteousness, and Sobriety*; or in other Words, *our Duty towards God,*

God, towards our Neighbour, and towards our Selves: For tho' we may in some Sense be said to bear some *Relation* to the *whole Universe*, as we are the *Inhabitants* of this *Earth*, and this *Earth* a part of the *Planetary System*, and this *System* only a part of the *Universe* that bears some *Relation* to other *Systems*; yet as the other *Planetary Systems* are at such an immense Distance, yea and the *Globes* of this our *System* are so far separated, we have no knowledge of what passes there, nor consequently any Duty arising from thence.

And, tho' we allow that *Angels* may in many Cases guard and assist us, yet their Agency is so commonly according to the *natural course of things*, and their Presence at any particular time so uncertain, that the *Relation* between us and them is more rarely brought into the Account: Tho' Reverence is unquestionably due to *superiour Beings*, when 'tis known that they are present, and Gratitude is always due to the benevolent, and more especially to our Benefactors: But tho' the Presence of finite Beings is not so easy to be discover'd, when they themselves are invisible and their Actions not distinguishable from the common course of Nature, yet we may be assured that *God* is always present,

sent, tho' invifible, becaufe he is neceffarily fo; Men are frequently prefent with us and vifible, and can fhare in the effects of our Behaviour, tho' abfent; and we ourfelves are compounded of *Body* and *Spirit*, which bear a *mutual Relation* to one another, and require *mutual Duties*.

Taking this therefore for a juft and comprehensive Difinction of our Duty; we fhall briefly go over each of the *Branches*, to fhew what a practical Influence *Prayer* has upon every one of them, and how much it difpofes Men to a more watchful and conftant Difcharge of every part of their Duty.

By much thinking upon any thing we commonly grow better acquainted with it; and of all Knowledge, the Knowledge of God is to be purfued, for it leads to *Life eternal*. *Joh. xvii.*

'Tis impoffible to pray without thinking upon *God*, the great Object of religious Worfhip: And I am perfuaded, that 'tis very much owing to *Prayer*, that the Being of a *God* is fo generally known and acknowledged.

From confidering that there is a *God*, we naturally pafs on to confider the *Relation* between him and us.

“ This is the *first Cause* of me, and of all
 “ things from whom I receiv'd my Being and
 “ all

“ all my Powers and Faculties ; and upon
 “ whom I depend every Moment ! The om-
 “ nipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent Law-
 “ giver and Judge ! My kind Benefactor,
 “ who sustains me, and provides for me, ob-
 “ serves my whole Deportment, and is a
 “ constant Witness to all I think, and speak,
 “ and do ! Justice requires that I imploy my
 “ Being, Powers and Faculties, and all my
 “ Injoyments agreeably to the Will of my
 “ Creator and Benefactor, my Law-giver
 “ and my Judge, *i. e.* rationally, or piously
 “ and virtuously ! Wisdom requires that I
 “ should imitate the most perfect Being, to
 “ the best of my Abilities ; and Gratitude re-
 “ quires, that I should please my best Friend
 “ as much as I can ! ”

Now Homage, and Honour, Imitation and
 Obedience are the best Oblations I can of-
 fer him ! An humble well-disposed Heart,
 and a pious prudent Life, are *Sacrifices with
 which his Soul is always well pleased.*

Such intense and frequent thinking upon
God must enlarge our Knowledge of him,
 and tend to impress his Image and Similitude;
 and methinks we should be glad to know,
 and make use of, the proper Means to ob-
 tain so very valuable an End ; for we are
 more

more concern'd to make him our Friend, who has the Disposals of the Rewards and Punishments of another State, than the greatest Malefactor can be to procure the Friendship of any earthly Judge. Let the wicked seriously, and for some time, try the Influence and Efficacy of daily *Prayer*; and they'll find it will do more towards reforming them, then all their *admired Heathen Authors*, or the *boasted Power of Philosophy*: For when we, in an humble and composed manner, address ourselves to *God* by *Prayer*, it not only diverts the Thoughts at present, from Sin and Folly (which the turning to any Business or Amusement might, in some Measure do,) but *devout Prayer* has also an apt Tendency to root up the Love of Sin, and to plant in its stead, good Dispositions, and virtuous Desires.

As to our Duty towards our Neighbour, Prayer does likewise influence us to the Discharge of this Part of our Duty; for this comes recommended to us both as the Will of *God*, and the Benefit of Mankind. Now, *Prayer* not only composes the Soul, to the Thoughtfulness and Deliberation (which is the most proper Frame for considering all Obligations,) but

it likewise reduces the Mind to Resignation, and a flexible Temper, so as to incline us *to have Respect unto all God's Commandments*, and among these *Justice* and *Charity* are none of the least. And, *Prayer* does not only cherish this general good Disposition; but that part of *Prayer* commonly called *Intercession* does more immediately tend to plant and cherish *Love, which is the fulfilling of the Law*

As for Instance — Do I *pray* for an Enemy? This must make, or suppose, me inclin'd to forgive him. Do I *pray* for *Friends*? This implies that I continue to wish them well, and strengthens the sacred Bands of Friendship, refines and exalts the noble Passion, and makes it *Christian* and *Divine*, lays the Foundation deeper, and is the most proper Method to make it sincere and everlasting. Do I *pray* for all Mankind? This enlarges or maintains my Charity and Benevolence towards all such as are of that Nature, of which I have the Honour to partake, and cherishes my Disposition to do any of them good as they fall in my Way, but especially to the sincerely virtuous, and holy.

Do I *pray* for Superiours, Inferiours, or Equals? This were to trifle with the great
God,

God, if it were not accompanied with Resolutions of filling up all Relations in Life with proper Duty. *Prayers* for the Afflicted, when rational and sincere, are accompany'd with what Succour and Relief we can conveniently afford them. And when we petition God to instruct the ignorant, reclaim the wicked, or make the righteous persevere, 'tis our Duty to use Endeavours (as well as *Prayers*,) for promoting so desirable a Work : *He that converteth a Sinner from the Errour of his Way ; doth save a Soul from Death, and hide a Multitude of Sins.*

As to our Duty towards our selves, as we are a Compound of Soul and Body, Prayer reminds us of our Duty towards both ; i. e. chiefly to mind the Affairs of the Soul, and in Subordination thereto the Affairs of the Body.

Confession of Sin brings our Faults to Mind, and may well make us sorry and ashamed, and sincerely to resolve to act another part.

Petitions for Mercy teach us our own weak and dependent State, and may humble us, and should make us look for help from above, and to act as obliged dependent Beings.

Praise and Thanksgiving secretly reproach us that we have made no better Returns for so many and such great Favours, and point out what ought to be our future Conduct.

He that daily goes to *God* by *Prayer* has a daily Check upon his Conscience, and a daily Spur to Repentance, Care, and Watchfulness ; he lives as 'twere under the Eye of the supreme Ruler, which (if any thing can) will make him circumspect. If such a one can't find out the Bent and Inclination of his own Heart, and the Tenour and Habit of his own Life, — No Man can. And if he don't prefer the Soul to the Body, rational to sensual Enjoyments, and Eternity to the things of Time, his Prayers are vain, and his Expectations vain.

The Sum of what has been said comes to this. Infinite unerring Wisdom, uncontrollable Power, and superlative Goodness have fixt, unalterably fixt, *the Terms of Acceptance*, with which Terms the Creature is made acquainted : And as they eventually comply or disobey, their Requests are finally heard, or deny'd ; and they themselves rewarded or punished, If *daily Prayer* cherish in any Man such a pious Disposition, then God will hear
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and answer him, not because he puts up * now and then a few Petitions, but because the Petitions he puts up either model his Heart (or flow from an Heart already modell'd) to such a Frame and Disposition as the wise and good *Governour* of all may rationally expect in such as partake of his Favours.

If such a Person be deny'd any particular Request, he'll in the End be no Loser by it; for all things work together for his good, and what of Injoyment he wants in this present State of Trial and Discipline, shall be abundantly made up to him in a future and better State; *the Scheme of Providence* being so calculated, as to reach beyond the present State of *Existence*. We need not wonder then, that good Men do ask many things in this Life, which God does not think proper to

* *Hunc collatis precibus adoramus, ab hoc justa, & honesta, & auditu ejus condigna deprecemur; non quo ipse desideret supplices nos esse, aut anxiis sustineri tot millium generationem videre. Utilitas hæc nostra est, & commodi nostri Rationem spectans. Nam quia proni ad Culpas, & ad Libidinis varios appetitus vitio sumus Infirmitatis ingenita, patitur se semper nostris Cogitationibus concipi, ut dum illum oramus, & mereri ejus contendimus Munera, accipiamus Innocentiae voluptatem, & ab omni nos Labe, delictorum omnium amputatione, purgemus.*
 Arnob. l. 1. p. 18.

grant

grant them. This is not a State of Retribution, and therefore many things that might gratify us, are at present with-held, as unfit for us; * and nothing could be a greater Curse, than to grant us every thing that our fancies might desire, or wish for, in this State of Darkness and Imperfection: Whereas in a State of Recompence, the Desires will not exceed the Injoyments.

See Dr.
Calamy's
Life of Mr.
How, 8vo.
p. 22.

Thus we may know, that God will answer *Prayers* without *immediate Visions* or *Revelations*, or without any such *Impressions*, as may intimate to us our *present* Acceptance.

I will only add that the *fervent Prayer of the righteous Man*, may be rationally expected to *avail* for others; inasmuch as when God grants such Requests, he grants them because the things petition'd for, are wise and proper and rational in themselves, (without which Circumstances he will never grant any Request,) and because of his great Love to Piety, which he rewards, honours, and encourages,

* Ζευ βασιλευ, τα μεν εσθλα και ευχομενοις και ανευκτοις
Αμμι δίδε, τα δε δεινα κ' ευχομενοις απαλεξοις.

The Prayer of the cautious Poet in *Plato*.

Optima da nobis, seu te, Pater, illa rogemus,

Seu non; Et contra nocitura rogitantibus arce.

See *Juvenal*, *Satyrs*.

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by thus gratifying the pious Man, and regarding the *Intercessions* of the Virtuous and Holy.

This, understood in a more noble and exalted Sense, may in some Measure point out to us the *Reasonableness* and *Prevalency* of the *Intercession* of our great *high Priest*, and *Advocate with the Father*, *Jesus Christ the righteous*, who is able to save to the uttermost, all those that come unto God thro' him, seeing he ever liveth, making continual *Intercession* for them.

As I have laid before you the *Solution*, allow me to conclude with some *Corollaries*.

Corol. I. The *Objections* of the *Sceptics* are not insuperable; and particularly 'tis *rational* to pray to an *infinitely wise, good, and unchangeable God*, inasmuch as *Prayer* transforms us into his *moral Image*, and plants or cherishes such a *Frame of Soul*, as, according to the wise *Scheme of Providence*, he will vouchsafe to bless.

Corol. II. If *God* would bestow all other Blessings upon us, without our *praying* for them, 'twould be an unspeakable Detriment to us; if we thereby lost that pious and humble, resign'd and obedient Temper, that Sense of *God* and *Religion*, and of the Strength of
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our Obligations to Virtue and Holiness, which are acquired and promoted by frequent *Prayer*.

Corol. III. 'Tis absurd to *pray* in an *unknown Tongue*. And the same holds of such Expressions as have no fixed Meaning; for 'tis not enough that *God* understands, Men must also understand, or else they can't join in the *Prayer*.

Corol. IV. * 'Tis not *Words* but *Thoughts* that are to be looked upon as our *Prayers*. Thus *God* and *Man* regard the Wishes and Desires of the Heart, as the only genuine and sincere *Prayer*. I own that an addressing *God*

* *Vir bonus, omne forum quem spectat, & omne Tribunal,
Quandocunque Deos vel Porco, vel Bove placat;
Jane Pater, clarè, clarè quum dixit, Apollo:
Labra movet, metuens audiri, Pulchra Laverna
Da mihi fallere, da justum sanctumque videri:
Noctem Peccatis, & fraudibus objice nubem.*

Hor. Ep. ad Quintum.

*Haud cuius promptum est, murmurque humilesque susurros
Tollere de Templo; & aperto vivere voto.*

*Mens bona, fama, Fides, hæc clare & ut audiat bestes:
Illa sibi introrsum, & sub Lingua immurmurat, O si
Ebullit Patruï præclarum funus; & O si
Sub Rostro crepet Argenti mihi seria detro
Hercule! Pupillumve utinam, quem proximus hæres
Impello, expungam! &c. &c. &c.* *Perf. Sat. 2.*

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with our Wishes is the common Notion of *Prayer* ; but I am satisfy'd, that *God* regards the habitual Bent and Inclination of the Soul, (whether Covetousness, Ambition, or Voluptuousness) more than *transient Petitions*, tho' they should be, for the time, sincere ; and consequently much more than the most * elegant Forms, or the most devout Expressions, that are not accompany'd with internal Desires. Our *Thoughts* are our *Prayers*, which *God* can understand as well without Words as with them, and according to our habitual Disposition may we expect to be treated both here and hereafter.

Corol. V. How vain must it be to *pray*, whilst Men are devoted to Vice and Immorality ? *When you make many Prayers, I will hide mine Eyes from you.—Your Hands are full of Blood, Is. i. 15. If I regard Iniquity in my Heart, the Lord will not hear me.*

* But inasmuch as a decent and agreeable Performance of this great Duty shows a greater Reverence and Regard for God and Divine Things, and very much recommends Religion among Men ; I would recommend *Dr. Watts's Guide for Prayer*, &c. to all such as are desirous of Assistance in performing this Duty with Honour and Decency, Ease and Elegance ; for there may be as much Fervency, and less Confusion, where there is the most just and happy Manner of Expression.

Pf. lxviii. 18. *The Lord is far from the Wicked, but he heareth the Prayer of the Upright.*
 Prov. xv. 28. *He that turneth away his Ear from hearing the Law, his Prayer shall be Abomination.* Prov. xxviii. 9. *The (most costly) Sacrifice of the Wicked is an Abomination to the Lord; but the Prayer of the Upright is his Delight.* Prov. xv 8. *Now we know that God heareth not Sinners, but if any be a Worshipper of God, and doth his Will, him he heareth.*
 John ix. 31.

Nay, Persons guilty of notorious Wickedness have been sometimes so fear'd in their Consciences, and struck with the Horrour of their Guilt, that they have not been able to pray, with any Hopes of Success and Acceptance. And, indeed, unless Men desire to promote their Repentance, and increase their virtuous Dispositions, and contract or confirm an Habit of Piety and Holiness, by their stated Devotions, they had e'en as good ne'er pretend to them.

But if any Person desires to cultivate a Likeness to God, and a Conformity to his Will, they can't take a more proper Method than that of frequent, fervent *Prayer*. And
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there's no Man * so likely to be heard and accepted, as he that has this praying Frame and Temper of Spirit.

In a Word, if *Prayer* make us better Men, it of Course renders us more acceptable unto *God*. And Answers to *Prayer* are not to be looked upon as extorted by Importunity, or as the Consequence of *much Speaking*; but as the Effects and Instances of *God's* uniform and continued Love to the pious and virtuous, which Piety and Virtue are wondrously promoted by daily *Prayer*.

Such holy Men, wanting a thoro' Knowledge of † Futurity, may ask for things improper; but such things the wise and good *God* in Mercy denies them.

And *blessed are they that keep his Commandments*! They have *infinite Wisdom* and *Goodness* to chuse for them, *infinite Power* and *Un-*

* *Cultus autem Deorum est optimus, idemque castissimus, atque sanctissimus, ut eos semper purâ, integrâ, atque incorruptâ mente & voce veneramur.* Cicero.

*Compositum Jus, fasque animi, sanctosque Recessus
Mentis, & incoctum generoso Pectus honesto,
Hæc cedo ut admoveam templis; & farre litabo.* Persius.

† *Permites ipsis expendere numinibus, quid
Conveniat nobis, rebusque sit utile nostris;
Nam pro jucundis utilia quæque dabunt Dii:
Charior est illis homo quam sibi; &c.* Juvenal.

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changeableness engaged for their Welfare! In *Prosperity* and *Adversity* they have a sure and *faithful Friend*! In *Sickness*, and at the *Hour of Death*, they know in whom they have *trusted*; and may enter upon another State undismay'd, commending *their Spirits* into his Hands, in whose joyous Presence they hope to spend the Ages of Eternity.

Let this encourage us to be frequently upon our Knees, that we may keep up a continual Sense of *God's* Presence with us. This will not suffer us to lie long in any Sin, nor to be satisfy'd with low Degrees of Virtue and Holiness; this will keep us serious and sober-minded, and administer Comfort to us, when our praying Seasons in this World shall be no more.

I am, Dear Sir,

Your Affectionate, Humble Servant,



G. BENSON.

F I N I S.

